United Nations A/64/558

General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 December 2009

Original: English

Sixty-fourth session
Agenda item 70 (a)
Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Letter dated 7 December 2009 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to refer to General Assembly resolution 60/124 of 15 December 2005, by which the Assembly established the Advisory Group to advise me on the use and impact of the Central Emergency Response Fund. In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 21 of the resolution, I transmit herewith a note on the outcome of the meeting of the Advisory Group held in New York on 2 and 3 November 2009 (see annex).

The note summarizes key points raised during the discussions on both the management of the Fund and its effect on humanitarian operations. It recognized the solid performance and management of the Fund. The Advisory Group also commended the work of the secretariat of the Fund towards finalizing a performance and accountability framework for the Fund, and called for the finalization of an umbrella letter of understanding with the United Nations agencies that receive funding from the Fund. The Advisory Group also reviewed its own terms of reference, and suggested that the Group be expanded to eighteen members, each of whom would serve a single, non-renewable three-year term. A third of the membership would be rotated each year.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of the Member States and Observer Missions, of whom 109 have so far contributed to the Fund.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon

09-63898 (E) 081209

Please recycle

Annex

Meeting of the Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund (2 and 3 November 2009)

Recommendations and conclusions

1. The Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund was established by the General Assembly in resolution 60/124 of 15 December 2005 to advise the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, on the use and impact of the Fund. The Group's second meeting of 2009 was held in New York on 2 and 3 November, and included six new independent experts who joined the group after being appointed by the Secretary-General in September 2009. The Vice-Chair, Mr. Moazzam Malik (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), served as Chair in the absence of Ms. Yoka Brandt, who was unable to attend because of pressing obligations.

2. During the meeting, the Emergency Relief Coordinator briefed the Advisory Group regarding the use and management of the Fund in 2009, and led the discussion on the development of a performance and accountability framework for the Fund. The United Nations Controller participated in the session concerning the revisions being made to the Secretary-General's Bulletin and the progress being made in devising an umbrella letter of understanding. The Advisory Group also discussed the recent reviews of the underfunded window and the "life-saving criteria", and reviewed its revised terms of reference and the workplan for the Group's next three meetings.

3. In the light of these discussions, the Group would like to make the following recommendations:

Management

4. The Group encouraged the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Fund secretariat to continue their professional management of the Fund. The Group also endorsed, and offered to assist in, the ongoing implementation of the strategy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to mobilize US$ 450 million in resources for the Fund annually, according to the target set by the General Assembly.

Performance and accountability framework

5. The Group welcomed the development of a draft performance and accountability framework for the Fund, which the Group had encouraged the secretariat to formulate at its last meeting. The Group noted that a strong performance and accountability framework was important for both beneficiary countries and donors. The Group recommended that the performance and accountability framework should be linked to the three objectives of the Fund outlined in General Assembly resolution 60/124, namely (1) promoting early action and response to save lives; (2) enhancing response to time-critical requirements based on demonstrable needs; and (3) strengthening core elements of humanitarian response in underfunded crises.

6. The performance and accountability framework should focus on measuring the Fund's added value and its impact on the overall humanitarian response to the overall humanitarian situation in a country, distinguishing the impact of individual projects funded by the Fund only where it is possible and sensible to do so. The performance and accountability framework should be light but robust, and make maximum use of existing agency reporting processes.

7. The Group noted the importance of annual reports submitted by resident/humanitarian coordinators on the use of the Fund at the country level. The Group stressed the importance of these reports being developed through an inclusive process, submitted on time and to a high standard, and asked the Fund secretariat to look again at how best to present a consolidated report drawing on this material.

8. The Group recommended that reporting arrangements should be complemented by independent evaluations in a small number of selected countries to measure the Fund's impact. The Group asked that a pilot evaluation based on one annual report of a resident/humanitarian coordinator should be conducted before the next meeting of the Group in April 2010.

9. The Group encouraged the Fund secretariat to continue its work to develop the performance and accountability framework, and to consult again with the Group via e-mail before the end of the year following additional discussions with humanitarian partners.

Life-saving criteria

10. The Group recommended that the Fund's "life-saving criteria" should continue to be defined as tightly as possible, but that some flexibility should be maintained to take some preventive, time-critical actions, such as the allocation in 2009 to combat locust infestations in Southern Africa. The Group also agreed that some limited coordination costs could be funded in the start-up phase of large-scale emergencies in exceptional cases, but stressed that this must not come at the expense of agency responsibility to mainstream cluster coordination costs and asked that this be kept under close review for a pilot period.

Review of the underfunded window

11. In their discussions on the review of the Fund's underfunded window, the Group noted improvements in the decision-making process and the increased use of quantitative data to support decision-making. The Group requested the Fund secretariat to ensure that underfunded allocations are making an impact, and to avoid giving relatively small allocations to poorly resourced programmes. The Group asked the secretariat to continue its efforts to be as transparent as possible about the methodology and data used in these allocations.

Relationship with non-governmental organizations

12. The Group expressed appreciation for the actions of the Emergency Relief Coordinator to bring the issue of partnerships with non-governmental organizations to the attention of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. They requested regular updates on the progress of the work currently being led by several United Nations agencies on this issue.

Administrative issues

13. The Group recognized that significant progress had been made to finalize the revised Secretary-General's Bulletin on the Central Emergency Response Fund and on the umbrella letter of understanding. The Group expressed its strong appreciation for the support given by the Controller and his Office to these processes. The Group requested that all possible steps be taken to ensure that the revised Secretary-General's Bulletin would enter into force by 1 January 2010, and that the umbrella letter of understanding would be finalized as soon as possible thereafter. The Group recommended that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee consider whether similar umbrella agreements might be negotiable between United Nations agencies and their non-governmental organization partners.

Terms of reference of the Advisory Group

14. The Group agreed slight revisions to its terms of reference, including an expansion to 18 full members each serving a single three-year term, and the continuation of the policy of rotating a third of the Group's membership each year. The Group asked that the revised terms of reference should be placed on the website of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

15. Finally, the Group agreed to investigate the possibility of holding its April 2010 meeting at the field level in a recipient country in order to meet with the affected Government and humanitarian partners, and look more closely at the added value of the Fund.